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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0581
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 003202

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2018
TAGS: PGOV KDEM RS
SUBJECT: MOSCOW SPS OPPOSES, REGIONS SUPPORT, SURKOV PLAN
TO DISMANTLE PARTY

REF: A. MOSCOW 3032
B. MOSCOW 2910

Classified By: Acting Political MC David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4(b)
and (d).

¶1. Summary: Opposition within the Union of Right Forces (SPS) to the party's impending dissolution is almost non-existent outside of Moscow. Moscow SPS leader Vladlen Maksimov and SPS Federal Political Council member Maria Gaydar have publicly opposed the dissolution and have urged regional branches to follow suit. So far their pleas have failed almost entirely to win support. As a result, SPS almost certainly will vote to dissolve at its November 15 national congress and then unite on November 16 with Civic Force and the Democratic Party under the banner of a new loyalist party, tentatively called Pravoe Delo (Right Cause). Maksimov called the party's dismantling a plan by Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov's to "destroy one of the last party licenses," adding a prediction that Acting SPS Chairman Leonid Gozman will not be among Right Cause's leaders. End Summary.

Moscow and Kostroma Regions Alone Against "Surkov's Plan"

¶2. (C) Moscow SPS Chairman Maksimov confirmed to us October 27 that the capital's branch strongly opposed the party's self-dissolution and merger with Civic Force and the Democratic Party. This "Kremlin project," he added, was Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff Surkov's plan to "destroy one of the last party licenses" remaining in Russia, robbing political opposition of one of its last (legal) outposts. (Note: Indeed, Acting SPS Chairman Leonid Gozman remarked in an October 28 Novyye Izvestiya interview that a key reason for transforming the party was the danger of "raiders seizing SPS." End Note.) Maksimov concluded that Gozman will receive the two-thirds support necessary for dissolution at the party's November 15 congress. According to Maksimov, Moscow SPS has always offered stronger Kremlin opposition than the regions because its national party leaders have resided in the capital. As a result of this "history of strong opposition," he predicted that 90 percent of Moscow SPS's 1,300 members would reject Gozman and follow Maksimov (and former SPS head Nikita Belykh) to the new Solidarity opposition movement.

¶3. (C) Maksimov acknowledged that the regions have acquiesced to the party's dissolution. Still, on October 21 he sent a letter to regional SPS offices urging party members "who disagree with the sale of the party to the Kremlin" to resist, adding that regional offices should not "give up silently." Support for Maksimov's plea was almost non-existent. One exception was Kostroma Region, where local SPS leaders have opposed the party's dismantling. Kostroma SPS leader Nikolay Sorokin lamented "the betrayal of the

party leadership" and the creation of "an artificial political entity with a questionable future." Sorokin predicted that the majority of Kostroma SPS members will join him in Solidarity if national SPS follows Gozman on November 15.

¶4. (SBU) At the national level, the lone voice of internal dissent against dissolution is SPS Federal Political Council member Maria Gaydar. Gaydar told media on October 30 that SPS is being held "hostage" and that Gozman will rely upon allegedly bogus regional congresses to support dissolution on November 15. Gaydar proposed "a plan for saving the party" to expose "falsified" regional congress. Following Maksimov's example, she issued a public letter on October 30 to the 33 SPS branches that have not yet held congresses, urging their members to oppose the Kremlin plan and to report irregularities. "Do not believe the lie" that SPS's fate is sealed, she exhorted. Gozman called Gaydar's accusations a "provocation," although he told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that he "would be rather surprised if all regions unanimously endorsed the project."

"Hollow" Regions Will Support Kremlin Plan

¶5. (C) Maksimov confessed to us that SPS has only a negligible presence in the regions. Of the party's approximately 70 branches, Maksimov estimated that at least half are "hollow" at the regional level and exist only as names on paper. Of the remaining branches with active members, Maksimov further calculated that only one-third would resist SPS's dissolution and turn instead to the new Solidarity movement. His back-of-the-envelope calculation

suggested that about 5,000-10,000 SPS members nationwide might reject Gozman and opt to join Solidarity. (On October 6, former Deputy Energy Minister and Solidarity organizer Vladimir Milov shared the same prediction of a one-third SPS defection. Ref A.)

¶6. (SBU) Maksimov's plea failed to resonate in the regions, although some regional branches have expressed only reluctant support for dissolution. Rostov SPS, for example, released a statement acknowledging that "we are forced to engage in dialogue with the authorities" and that SPS dissolution offers the "only possible way to preserve the legitimate right liberal democratic party in Russia." Tver Oblast originally expressed opposition to the Kremlin project in early October, but now supports it in the week before its regional congress. *Kommersant* reported October 30 that Vologda SPS's leader supported the project but members did not, so no delegates to the national congress have been selected. In Altai Krai, members could not agree on cooperating with Civic Force and the Democratic Party, which may prevent them from selecting delegates at their upcoming congress. Ryazan SPS Chairman Aleksandr Perehvatova and his deputy issued a statement October 27 that "there is no point" in opposing the Kremlin project. There is no evidence that any region aside from Kostroma will oppose the Kremlin plan.

¶7. (C) Other regional branches have eagerly embraced the transformation and the new funding and media access that surely will follow. Kemerovo SPS Chairman Dmitriy Shagiakhmetov told us October 29 that his regional branch "supported the project 100 percent," adding that neighboring Krasnoyarsk would similarly support it. (Shagiakhmetov's support contrasts sharply with his September 22 assertion to us that he would direct his efforts instead to the December 13 Solidarity conference. Ref B.)

Future Right Cause Leaders: Gozman and Bogdanov Gone?

¶8. (C) Maksimov predicted that Leonid Gozman would not remain leader of the new Right Cause, arguing that Gozman will have fulfilled his role as shepherd of SPS's demise. "There will be no need for Gozman after November 15," Maksimov predicted, adding that Gozman will withdraw to a

position at RosNanotech under Anatoliy Chubais, his long-time benefactor. Maksimov further predicted that Democratic Party head Andrey Bogdanov would have no future in Right Cause's leadership, despite assurances that Bogdanov had received that he would become chairman of its Moscow branch. Maksimov predicted that, due to Chubais' extreme dislike of Bogdanov, Gozman would have to cast Bogdanov afloat.

Comment

19. (C) SPS's failure to collect enough valid signatures to participate in recent regional elections supports Maksimov's assertion that SPS was "hollow" outside of Moscow. Even so, Maksimov and Gaydar both lack the national influence to convince the "real" regional SPS branches to oppose the Kremlin project. Such flaccid regional opposition also portends difficulties ahead for the new Solidarity movement to establish relevance east of the Urals. On the other hand, SPS's legacy structures likely will provide its successor (Right Cause) with the necessary institutional basis for participating in future elections. Fundraising and membership drives for Right Cause will be much easier with the Kremlin's imprimatur, although attracting members may prove difficult among an electorate that increasingly sees little need for parties at all.

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